



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

**Our Lady Help of Christians Church, East Victoria Park
Sunday 31 October, 2021**

Over the last two weekends, I've been in different parishes, those two parishes have been quite close geographically, and I have been reflecting on the story on the land upon which they sit. The land this story has, a story that goes back tens of thousands of years. The first one is the Parish of Balcatta, the other one was the parish of Ballajura, with Mirrabooka Parish in between. Having been the Parish Priest of Mirrabooka, I'm more familiar with that story, as I say that it is one that goes back thousands of years of occupation by the Aboriginal people.

The land on both sides of Mirrabooka and Koondoola was wetlands, swamps and lakes. And it's no it's no real stretch of the imagination to realise that this was why that land was taken up for farming and market gardening, farming particularly.

It was very significant to those Aboriginal people who lived on those lands for 40 to 60,000 years, because those two areas were full of food, they were areas that they would go in order to catch tortoise, the kangaroo or the emu, that would gather in those areas, particularly in the summer months.

I can say for those two parishes, that they also are writing a story, contributing to the story of that land. Because of the presence of a Christian community, that brings the fullness of the message of God to humanity in Jesus Christ.

The work that I do with Aboriginal people today, is interesting because they acknowledge that at a certain point in their history, they came to know Jesus Christ, they came to know Jesus Christ through the work of the missionaries. They give thanks for the fact that now they understand that relationship that God has had with them over all those tens of thousands of years. That the great Spirit of God has been with God in helping them, protecting them, and enabling them to pass on generation by generation, the customs, the traditions of their people, and the stories that help them to understand who they are, and why they are there. And the stories that help them understand the land in which they live.



I'm not so familiar with the story that might be here, that would be here, of those people who have lived here before us.

But I think that is perhaps one of the interesting things that a parish could do, is to find out something of that story of the peoples who were here before us.

Today, we hear the Shema, "Shema Israel", which is a prayer that is said three times a day, the Jewish people in the morning, in the middle of the day, and at the end of the day.

If you were to go to a home of a Jewish family, you would find at the front door, a little container, which has that text in it so when the family leaves in the morning to go to work or to school, as they pass that little cylinder they touch it and will say that prayer 'Listen Israel.'

And of course, it is that text that we hear both in the first reading and in the Gospel today. Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

It's a creed, a summary of their faith, and at the same time, it is a prayer that they ask the Lord, to help them hear Him speaking to them in the events of the day that will unfold.

Someone has suggested that maybe this is a prayer that we Christians should also continue to use each day. Asking that, that spirit of God would be very real to us, because we have listened to him, speaking to us in the events and the experiences each day that we have already lived.

So that when we begin the new day, we will have the confidence that the Spirit of God is with us, and speaking to us, and helping us to understand our lives and our purpose, and our mission, why we are a Christian community.

In fact, every parish has a mission to be a people who listen for the Spirit's voice, and what the Spirit is asking of us as a community.

And then call on the strength of that spirit to put into action what we hear Him speaking to us about. To be a people who are a Christian, to be a people who live with joy because we know that we are loved, because that's one of the things that we hear in this beautiful prayer the Shema. That we can love, because we understand that we were loved first, that God has loved us first.

And it is because of that, that we begin to know and understand what love itself is and then we're able then to love the others around us. Because when Jesus gave this answer to the scribe he also added a text from the Book of Leviticus. And that is that he must love your neighbor as yourself. Knowing that love has come to us first, has come seeking us first. Love is the reason why we can see the goodness of the work of the spirit in our lives and we can give thanks and it



gives us the capacity to see those around us in our lives, equally loved by God, equally treasured by God, and is a reason in turn for us to love them.

At the end of the Mass, as I said earlier, we will go outside and gather in front of the church where we will bless the statue of Our Lady Help of Christians.

I know if the Archbishop was here, this would be a very pleasing event, because Our Lady Help of Christians is the title of Mary that the founder of the Salesians, Don Bosco promoted very much throughout his life and throughout his ministry.

It's a title of Mary that's very sacred and very precious to the Church as well, because it is that care, that help, that strength in the prayer of Mary, that we believe the Church, in many times of difficulty has been helped. Probably the one that was most significant was in the days of Napoleon, when the Pope was taken captive, and put into exile, and when he finally was released, liberated and returned to Rome, it was a pilgrimage that he took city by city on his way back to Rome, where he would go to the sanctuaries to the shrines dedicated to Mary, and give thanks for the liberation of the Church. Not just his own, but the liberation of the church, from the terrible oppression that Napoleon applied to the church. But there are many, many other events in Church history, where people have turned to Mary and eventually have been able to praise her and thank her for the way in which she has helped in her prayer for us, her intercession for us.

So for us to honor Mary in this way, this parish which is named after Our Lady Help of Christians, is a way in which we too, can approach Mary with that faith and confidence that we know from the story of the Church. Let's then in this Eucharist, pray for that strength we need in our turn to be those who give a sign to the world of our faith, and our trust in God. Give a sign to the world of that capacity that we hope is building within each of us to love one another. And that way, to be a wonderful sign of Christ's presence is within us and guiding us and strengthening us for our mission.

And as a community that working together with that love, that we are able to provide this wonderful witness to our faith. And to that love that God has for all people. So we thank God for this occasion, and we pray that the Lord will strengthen this parish so it can make its contribution to the story of this land.